

By Rep. Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
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Just a few short years ago, who would have thought our next president's name would be Barack Obama? Who would have thought that an African American man born in Hawaii with a mother from Kansas and a father from Kenya would become the leader of the free world?

President-elect Obama's story is one that defies all odds. It is a story of overcoming adversity and persevering against doubt. It truly is a story of hope.

Forty years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. prophesied about this day when he told us he had been to the mountain top and seen the Promised Land and that, "we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land". Today, we can see the promised land of opportunity. We have reached a point in this great country where any child - black or white, girl or boy, rich or poor – can dream of becoming President of the United States.

Barack Obama's inauguration means that no hope is unfounded. It is a reminder of Lincoln's words at Gettysburg that Americans have a "government of the people, by the people, for the people." This point is important and a point that we should never forget. President-elect Obama's inauguration is a celebration of what makes America great. It is a celebration of the American spirit that unifies a vast country and a diverse group of people. It represents the fact that, despite all our differences, we are one as Americans.

Yet there is more work that needs to be done. Our country still faces racial, regional, and economic differences. We must be cognizant of these problems, especially, in the face of today's uncertain times. This inauguration, however, represents a moment in time where we can overcome these divisions and work together. Such moments do not come often, so it is imperative that we take full advantage when they do.

President-elect Obama has promised to work with all parties and all constituencies. As a Member of Congress, I plan to hold him to that promise. Our economy is in trouble. Unemployment is rising, home foreclosures are increasing, and people are having trouble finding affordable health insurance. We must come together in order to change course.

Here in Washington, we must ignore partisan differences and focus on solutions. Back home, we will need to look after our neighbors as though they were members of our own family. It may not be easy but together we will prevail through these tough times. The election of Barack Obama shows that such unity is possible. It shows that in the United States of America, no challenge is too difficult for us, as a united people, to overcome.

On January 20, 2009, I want you, as an American citizen, to celebrate the fact that we live in the world's greatest country where anything is possible if you believe in yourself and work hard. I want you to celebrate the things that bring us together; not the things that divide us. I want you to celebrate all those Civil Rights giants who made so many sacrifices so that we could stand on the brink of history tomorrow.

To me, this inauguration is not just a celebration for President elect Obama. It is a celebration

for this country and every American in it. It is a celebration of hope for a greener, more prosperous, and more peaceful world.